

## **LANE LAMBERT: In an empty courtroom, the same justice gets done**

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COMMENTARY- Murder is murder, the saying goes, though it doesn't always seem that way at court. We're seeing that now, with the trials of accused mobster James "Whitey" Bulger and the defendants in the fatal 2011 home invasion shooting of Tina Gonsalves of Rockland.

Jury selection is still under way for Bulger, who's charged with 19 murders from the 1970s and '80s, but that hasn't kept a thicket of TV news vans from keeping a daily vigil outside the Moakley U.S. Courthouse in South Boston. It's the trial of the decade. Everyone knows who Bulger is, and he's drawing saturation coverage.

Far from the glare of cameras, the trial of Orlando Kavanaugh and Tyrell Nicholas got under way late last week at Brockton Superior Court. They're charged with killing a woman known by few except her family and friends – until she was shot in her own home, in what prosecutors say was an attempted drug theft gone bad.

Seats for Bulger's trial have been claimed for weeks. When the jury for Kavanaugh and Nicholas was completed, Plymouth County prosecutors and the two men's defense attorneys made their opening statements to a near-empty courtroom – no spectators, just a lone reporter and several prospective witnesses.

The courtrooms match the trials. The varnished spectator benches in the venerable Brockton courthouse are nicked and worn from long years and countless cases. Courtroom 11 in the Moakley courthouse is spacious and bright, a stage set for a sensational trial.

Tina Gonsalves wasn't killed amid gangland score settling, like John McIntyre of Quincy, or because she reportedly knew too much, like Debra Davis of Randolph. Prosecutors say Kavanaugh wanted to steal drugs and money from Gonsalves' son. She was shot as she brandished a vacuum cleaner attachment at the intruder.

The unequal attention is likely to last beyond the verdicts in both cases.

If Bulger is convicted, victims' family members will be in front of the cameras, as they have been since Bulger was caught and arrested in California – and before. Bulger's conviction would be a prize for many, including the U.S. Attorney's Office and a tarnished Boston FBI.



It's not clear who will speak for Gonsalves. Her justice may be silent, compared to Bulger's alleged victims, but justice will be done one way or another, even if court officers are the only witnesses.

That's how most of our justice gets done, and that matters more than it might appear. It's justice all the same. Maybe more.

Patriot Ledger reporter Lane Lambert has covered numerous local and federal court cases, including Catherine Greig's conviction for harboring Bulger.